

## half magic

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## half magic

by [meridies](#)

### Summary

Dream is a senior attending the exclusive California School of the Arts, or CSA. He's busy living out his summer in absolute boredom when a new kid moves into the house next to him, and turns his life upside down.

Featuring stargazing, night-blooming jasmine, pockets full of meteorites, and a glow-in-the-dark pen.

### Notes

finally combining two of my fav things, mcyt and i'll give you the sun.

the prompt for today was gift exchange/ornaments, and technically this fills one of those (if you squint). anyway, hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

This is how it all begins.

In the nighttime, vivid and black over the landscape of suburban California. Dream has one leg dangling out his second floor window and the other one is tucked against his chest, held up to his chin. He's been at the beach all day, and his skin is still slick with the sweat that comes from sitting underneath the sun. The smell of his mother's meatloaf and green beans wafts up from

downstairs. Dream couldn't be less hungry.

He glances out across the way and sees a window pushed down, in the house across from him. The window itself belongs to the Victorian style house, painted blue, with lacy white trim and a broad white door. It's the epitome of middle class suburbs. It's got a classic little picket fence, stabbing up into the sky, and a wide stretch of green grass, all sprawled out beneath the sky.

Dream knows the house. It's been up for sale for weeks, red flags in the wind, and now someone seems to have finally moved in.

He watches the window, pushed down. Someone props a telescope out the side, firmly mounted, and angles it up at the sky. Dream traces the lines of this person with his eyes and unwittingly, his fingers make a portrait of them in his legs, on his desk, on his arms, lines and marks and sketches. The boy—sure looks like a boy, definitely shorter than Dream from the looks of it—adjusts the telescope once more before peering into it.

He's magical. He looks like he's made of stars. Silhouetted by pure light.

Dream goes to find some paper and a pencil, fumbling for his sketchbook. His hand moves faster than his eyes can. He doesn't even look down at the paper. It feels like he's intruding on something private, on something not meant to be seen, something only meant to be shared between this boy and the planets and the wide, black sky.

The person looks up to the stars, and Dream thinks, *Boy-With-The-Stars*.

Dream looks down at the portrait he's just drawn, all cubist and jagged pieces because the Boy-With-The-Stars has a face like glass. Dream can't really see his face that well in this light but his fingers are still aching to draw Boy-With-The-Stars again. He wants to, he wants to so badly.

(*Portrait, Self Portrait: The Boy Who Watched The Boy Hypnotize the World*).

He can barely tear his eyes away from him. His finger sketch it out again on his leg, vibrant and quicker than forked lightning. The boy looks up to the sky again, angling the telescope to get a better image, and Dream forgets how to breathe, he forgets how to do everything. All that matters is this sight across from him.

Dream prays that the Boy-With-The-Stars goes to California School of Arts. He prays that he's a senior and taking the same classes that Dream is taking and he prays that he doesn't end up going to Lakeshore High, because it truly would be a massacre of his hope if it turned out that someone as interesting and unique as Boy-With-The-Stars goes somewhere so bland.

"Dream!" his mother shouts, and Dream is startled out of the most elaborate life, the one he lives in his mind, hiding away from everyone else. "Dinner!"

"Coming," Dream shouts, and he must shout it loud enough to be heard, because the Boy-With-The-Stars glances over at his window. A feeling of hot embarrassment flushes through him.

He hopes that he wasn't caught spying.

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As it turns out, the Boy-With-The-Stars has a name. His name is *George*. It sounds beautiful when

he says it, broadly English and accented.

He holds a hand out to Dream and smiles, at barely eight in the morning the next day. Dream is wheeling the trash bins back inside. “I saw you watching me yesterday.”

“Oh,” Dream says, dumbfounded. “I didn’t mean to spy.”

“That’s alright,” he grins, “We all have to spy on things sometimes.”

“Not really,” Dream says, but George doesn’t seem to hear him. He’s shorter than Dream, springing up and down on the balls of his toes like he can hardly keep still, and he looks about the same age as Dream, maybe a little bit older.

“Anyway,” George says, “I’m going meteorite hunting in a few minutes. Wanna come?”

He gestures to the coat that he’s wearing, even though it’s nearly ninety degrees and it must be boiling. The coat is blue with about a million pockets, for hiding all the stars that he’s going to pick up from the ground.

Dream says, “Of course.”

“Wonderful,” George sighs, “I can’t wait to teach someone else all about outer space. We just moved in last week, I feel starved for friends. Do you go to Lakeshore?”

Dream shakes his head. He wouldn’t be caught dead going to the black hole of creativity that is Lakeshore High School.

He says, “I go to CSA.”

George’s face splits into a smile. “Really? That’s epic.”

“Do you go?”

George nods. “I’m going to be a senior this year.”

Luck is on Dream’s side. It always is. Dream wants to shout and jump up and down with how *giddy* this luck makes him feel.

As if reading his mind, George says, “The thing about meteorite hunting is that you need to be lucky and smart. Are you very lucky?”

“I think so,” Dream says, still reeling.

“Hold this, then” George says, and passes Dream what looks like a metal detector. It’s long and thin, and George says, “It’s a metal detector.”

Still not following entirely, Dream says, “What do you need it for?”

George grins. Toothy and wide. “Meteorite hunting. Keep up! I collect them. I have an entire case full of them at home.”

Dream keeps up. George leads him on a winding trail into the forests that surround their suburbs, and he talks, and Dream listens.

He is bright and shining and smiling. He’s not as tan as Dream is, but he explains that he moved from Britain recently (which explains the gorgeous accent, the one that wraps around Dream’s ears

and demands for him to do whatever George wishes). He sculpts (in both marble and clay) which is why he managed to get into the highly exclusive CSA, but what he's really interested in is *stars*.

"It's mostly space garbage," George admits, "But the sky is always falling. Always. You'll see. People have no idea."

He's right. Because they're not revolutionaries like Dream and George are.

It only takes two hours before George crouches down to the ground and he picks up a rock, smooth and round. It's black, rubbed to a shine, and he says, "Here. For you."

He tosses the rock to Dream in a low, underhand arc. It falls near perfectly into Dream's palm.

Dream blinks. He looks at it. It's cool from the forest floor. Damp and earthy to the touch.

"For me?" he says, nearly gaping. "Seriously?"

"Of course," George says, "The first find always goes to the new person. Keep it. It's yours."

Dream tries to hand it back, but George doesn't accept a returned gift. In fact, he takes it, and then physically slips it into Dream's pocket. He's very forward, in a way that Dream can't even fathom being with a new person. The only person he's truly close to is Sapnap, and then again, they've known each other since they sat next to each other in the same kindergarten class. He can't fathom moving in his senior year of high school to an entirely new area and being forced to make friends. Luckily, George seems the type to make friends.

An hour later:

"You know, you're not much of a talker."

Dream considers this. It's probably true. They've been walking in silence for nearly an hour, meandering ever closer to the edge of the woods. The sun is starting to dip in the horizon, painting the sky chock full of colors. Azure and violent and orange and magenta.

(*Portrait: When God Goes Outside the Lines*)

"Not really," Dream says. It's a little embarrassing to admit.

George points towards Dream's sketchbook, which remains tucked against his side, even when Dream tries to separate himself from it. He takes it with him everywhere. "I guess you just talk in there, huh?"

Dream thinks about the image of George from the night before, all cubist and jagged and beautiful. Dream thinks that it might be the most beautiful thing he's ever drawn before.

"Pretty much," Dream says, and he blurts, "But I paint in my head. A lot of the time."

Dream has never told anyone about how much he dreams. He has an entire museum in his head, where no one but him can see. It's larger than the Louvre and twice as broad, filled to the brim with paintings. He's never let anyone into his invisible museum before.

"That's so cool," George says, and his tone is sincere. "What were you painting?"

"You."

George's eyes widen. Dream blanches. He didn't mean to say that. He didn't mean to, it just

popped out, in the same way that George seems to drag every inch of himself to the surface.

“Well?” George says. “How did I come out?”

There’s no rudeness in his voice at all, just mild curiosity. Dream finds himself pulled to it, a moth to a lamp.

This is how George’s painting is in Dream’s mind, the Boy-With-The-Stars: floating in the air, just below the foliage of the trees, jacket open and pouring from it, a sky full of stars. All blue and orange and yellow.

“Decent,” Dream says, and his throat dries up.

“Excellent,” George says, and they’ve reached the edge of the forest. Their feet hit pavement instead of springy pine needles. “You know, if you wanted to go meteorite hunting tomorrow, let me know. You can shout from your window. I’ll hear it.”

With that, he vanishes into the growing shadows.

Dream stays still until he feels like he’s growing roots, and then he has to move as well.

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That night, Dream opens his window. George has his open as well, with his telescope propped out of the side, and even in the darkness, Dream can see his smile clear as day.

He folds a paper airplane. By some miraculous aim, it lands perfectly on George’s windowsill.

*hello :)*

George laughs. He shouts, “You can say that out loud! I’ll hear it!”

“Hello,” Dream surprises himself by saying.

For all his talking with George earlier that day, he’s strangely silent at home—unless when he’s with Sapnap, in which case both of them are loud enough to shake the earth beneath their feet.

“Hi!” George says enthusiastically in return. “Have you looked at the stars tonight?”

Dream hasn’t. He directs his gaze up.

“Mars is out,” George calls. “The red planet.”

Dream knows what Mars is. He took fourth grade science. He can see Mars in the sky, burning red, and he says to George, “Where is it again?”

George smiles. Dream isn’t sure if he knows what Dream is attempting to do, but he talks and talks and talks into the empty night. He talks until there’s a shout on his end—*George! Supper’s ready!*—and then he slams his door shut.

Without looking, without thinking, without breathing, Dream draws him again.

Over and over again until he thinks he’s finally gotten him right. Gotten the exact look in his eyes

when he sees Dream, the knuckles and the slight scar on his thumb when he picks up meteorites from the earth. When Dream squints just right, looking at his own drawing of George, he gets the same hijacked feeling that he gets when he sees the real George.

His heart is pounding, his thoughts are spinning a mile an hour. Dream gets so excited that he has to stand up and walk around his room nearly fifty times before he's able to calm down.

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The next time Dream sees George is under the summer sun, at Castillo Bay. The water is turquoise and gentle. Dream digs his toes into the sand and relishes the feel of it squirming in between his toes. The sun beats down heavy and warm onto his head. A sunburn prickles across the back of his neck.

"Oh," George says, sounding surprised when he approaches and sees him. "Dream! You again."

George has brought the sea upshore with him, in waves of blue and green. Dream thinks about all those knuckles in his fingers and how they bend forward and back if you're double jointed, and he imagines those hands holding the sea overhead, all bluegreen and fishy and warm. His skin smells like coconut sunscreen and salt.

(*Portrait: The Boy Who Walked Off With The Sea.*)

"Me!" Dream says, almost too eager, and George takes a seat next to him. He stretches out. He's wearing a hideously patterned Hawaiian shirt, bright red and yellow, and it's almost too big for his frame. He plucks at it when he sits down and catches Dream's glance.

"My mom made me wear it," he explains. "Something about *bright colors catching people's eyes*. I think she's still under the impression that I haven't made any friends at all."

"Oh," Dream says, "Am I your friend?"

"Of course," George says. "You went meteorite hunting with me. That's practically a declaration of best-friendship."

"Really?"

"You still have that meteorite, right?"

"Of course," Dream says. He still has it. He rubs a thumb over it every night before he goes to sleep.

"Then yeah," George grins, "We're still friends."

He's so cool. He almost doesn't seem like a human.

Dream blurts, "If you're an alien, you've sure been prepared well for Earth."

"Oh, definitely," George says, and he barely seems fazed at all by the inner workings of Dream's thoughts. "There's a whole school for it. I got an A+ in my 'passing as a human' class." He leans over, nudges his shoulder against Dream's. "You, on the other hand..."

"Hey," Dream protests, face red, "It wasn't my fault. They just threw me in without preparation."

Clueless.”

He means for it to come out as a joke, but it comes out too serious to be anything but the truth. It is true. Sometimes Dream feels like he’s missed everything in the world. Like people were born with some sort of instruction manual that he never received.

Conversationally, George says, “I may not have met many people here, but I do know that you’re the best of them.”

Something wild and flourishing takes root in Dream’s chest. Green roots grow over his lungs and take over his ribcage; pink flowers sprout from them, petals moving with the wind. For a moment Dream feels like he can barely breathe.

(*Self-Portrait: Alive*)

“You’re stupid,” Dream says. “They should have left you in the alien school.”

“They couldn’t,” George proclaims. “I would have busted out.”

Dream looks at him again. He’s leaning back, elbow deep in the sand, and his head is tilted back. The red floral pattern of his shirt is vibrant against his freckled skin. Dream knows from experience that you have to look at someone for a very long time to see what they’re covering up, what their inside face actually looks like, and when you do see it and get it down, that’s the thing that makes people freak out about how much a drawing looks like them.

George’s inside face only looks contemplative. And a little worried.

He says, out of the blue, “Do you ever make those pictures in real life?”

“What?”

He points to his temple. “The ones inside your head. Do you ever paint them in real life?”

Dream thinks about a sketchbook filled to the brim with drawings of George’s eyes. “Sometimes.”

“Did you make it?”

Dream stalls, “Make what?”

More quietly: “You know. The one of me.”

Wordlessly, for he can’t avoid it any longer, Dream passes George the sketchbook at his side. He flips it open to the most recent sketch of George— hair curling up at the edges from the summer heat, stars spilling from his pockets and hands, floating off the ground, wrapped in mysticism.

George goes silent. Dream’s heart skips a beat.

“It’s okay if you don’t like it,” he blurts, all at once, even though it’s *not* okay if George doesn’t like it, because that would be the only thing to crush Dream’s soul, “It’s not a big deal, I draw everyone, pretty much, mostly for fun— so it’s okay if you don’t—” He reaches for the pad back, words running dry, but George refuses to let go.

“Are you kidding?” George exclaims. His face unfurls in light. “This is fucking *amazing*. ”

A circuit flips in Dream’s chest. One he didn’t know he had.

“What?”

“It’s so fucking cool,” George rambles, and he traces his fingers over the lines Dream has drawn, “Holy shit. I look like the aurora borealis. This is *amazing*. ”

“You think?”

“You are the most talented person I have ever met,” George says, and corrects himself, “ *Will* ever meet, too. You’re one of a kind, aren’t you?”

The sea pulses in and out with the beat of his heart. The sand digs into Dream’s hands and gets underneath his fingernails and all he can think about is the inch of sand separating him and George. So close they would almost touch.

He holds that glowing feeling so close to his heart. When they’re forced to leave for the day, it’s nearly painful.

(*Self-Portrait: Boy Dives into a Lake of Light*)

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Two weeks later, Dream wakes up to the most stereotypical thing imaginable.

There are pebbles being thrown at his window. Rattling the glass. Dream rubs at his eyes, bleary from sleep, and goes to open it.

Standing below his window, right by the creeping ivy, crawling up in waves of green, is George. He has the little case that he carries all his meteorites around in with him, and it’s open. He’s been throwing stars at Dream’s window trying to wake him up. Stars!

“George!” Dream says, almost forgetting that he has to be quiet. “It’s nearly one!”

“There’s no moon!” George whisper-shouts back. “And no clouds! It’s the perfect night for stargazing!”

George is in his pajamas. And so Dream doesn’t even bother to put on his real clothes either. He stays in his sweatpants, with *CSA* stamped firmly on the side, and pulls on a shirt. His hair is rumpled and messy and George laughs when he sees him creeping out the front door. He reaches out a hand to flatten it, and Dream doesn’t bother trying to stop him.

“Come on,” he says.

“Where are we going?”

“The ocean, of course!”

He takes Dream’s hand and tugs him along. Electricity ricochets from every place his skin touches against Dream’s. For a moment, every atom in Dream’s body buzzes to life, all neon flashing colors and bright clouds and panicked wiring.

At the same moment, the scent of jasmine engulfs them.

Dream’s grandmother used to say to hold his breath around the scent of night-blooming jasmine if

he didn't want to give away all his secrets.

Dream really hopes this one bit of advice is true. He wants to know George's secrets. He wants to pull him apart at the seams and see what makes him tick.

The forest is dark at night, but the silver moon peers through the foliage overhead. George fumbles for a flashlight from his coat pocket. It's broad and clunky. He flicks it on and cheerfully turns it towards Dream. It nearly blinds him.

"Ow," Dream says, and squeezes his eyes shut.

"Whoops," George says, a laugh, "Sorry."

They keep walking.

As they go, the sound of the sea overpowers everything. Dream casts his mind back to Castillo Bay, sitting there with his feet in the water, to George's smile. The smell of coconut. The taste of salt. The breeze through his hair.

Absentmindedly, he says, "I could never be a fish."

"Me neither," George shakes his head. "Maybe an eel, though. Electric. Like your hair."

Dream's hand goes to flatten his hair. He misses the flash of a smile on George's face, brighter than the sun.

He doesn't miss George's laugh, muffled, and it shoots Dream dead with happiness.

"The sea is the best for stargazing 'cause there's no lights out there, ever," he says, and beckons Dream with a hand. "Come on, let's go."

They find seats on the sand. George slips his shoes off and digs his feet in. They both tilt their heads back and look up at the wide, wide expanse of stars. Out here in the middle of nowhere, the sky is *full* of them. They're so bright that Dream feels like if he keeps looking, soon he won't see any space between them at all. It'll just be a sky full of glittering diamonds.

"So," George says, and from his jacket, pulls out a cheap sketchbook and a pen. He starts writing with it. It's glow in the dark ink. *Cool.* "Tell me all the constellations you know."

Dream fumbles for a response.

"Um," he says, which is very eloquent, "I know the Big Dipper."

"Excellent."

"And the Little Dipper. And Orion."

"What about the Twins?"

Dream blinks. "What?"

George points up with the tip of his pen. "Castor. Pollux. They're the heads of the twins." With the pen again, he makes arbitrary lines between seemingly random dots. It looks like nothing of meaning whatsoever to Dream until George makes a final line, connecting them, and the sketch glows to life. "Castor was mortal, Pollux was immortal."

He's very close to Dream at that point, close enough that Dream can smell the scent of his shampoo and the salt on his skin from the spray of the waves. His fingers are trembling and Dream can't be sure that they won't reach out of their own accord to touch George in some way—his neck, his shoulders, his wrist—and he stuffs them in his pocket. They twitch in annoyance. He closes his fingers around the rock that George gave him. A meteorite, falling from the sky.

"When Castor died, Pollux missed him so much that he made a deal to share his immortality with him," George says. He looks back up to the sky. "That's how they both ended up in the sky."

"Yeah," Dream breathes. "I'd do that. Totally."

George laughs. "You have a sibling, then? Makes sense."

Dream wouldn't share his immortality with a sibling at all even if he had one. That's not what he meant, but George has already moved on, and it's too late to correct him. His face flushes. *I'd share my immortality with you*, he wants to scream, but no words emerge from his mouth.

"The Twins are thought to be responsible for shipwrecks," George continues, "Some sailors call them St. Elmo's fire."

"Ah," Dream says, having no idea what that is.

George barrages on, like he's reading directly from a dictionary page in his head. "It's an electrical weather phenomenon where a luminous plasma's created because charged particles separate and create electric fields that in turn create this corona—"

"Epic," Dream says, and he means it. He likes hearing George talk, and George does. He continues on just as incomprehensibly even though Dream understands none of what he's discussing. All he knows is this: the Twins make things burst into flames. Dream wonders if they'll set him on fire as well, set the two of them on fire. Burning endlessly together.

Finally, George trails off. The scent of jasmine is strong, almost overpowering. The flashlight rests between them, pointed towards the sea. Dream flicks it off with one hand. Still, he can see George, underneath the light of the stars. The wind blows against his shirt, pushing it flat against him in the same way Dream wants to. He wants it so bad that his mouth goes dry.

"The smell of jasmine makes people tell their secrets," Dream blurts.

George's eyebrows raise. "Really?"

Dream nods. "That's what my grandmother used to tell me. She used to say all sorts of things."

"And why are you telling me this now, Dream?" George teases, and he pushes himself up on his forearms to look at him. "Want to learn all my secrets?"

"I'm just saying," Dream mutters, feeling somewhat defensive for no reason at all. "We all have secrets, don't we?"

"Tell me one of yours, then."

Dream thinks about all the things he could say and what he lands on is this: "I spy on people."

"Who?"

"Not everyone," Dream says, although that's pretty much the truth. "Just when I'm drawing. So I

can see people. The other day I was sitting outside CSA looking into their summer sketching class. I drew the model who was sitting there.”

“Ever get caught?”

“Yeah,” Dream says. “By the model himself. He laughed. It was very embarrassing.”

George laughs as well. “Have you ever spied on me?”

In all the ways that are mortifying to say, Dream thinks. He doesn’t say that though. His breath catches in his throat. He doesn’t look through his bedroom window, doesn’t do anything creepy. But he sees George walking down the sidewalks, splashing through the tidepools, and he thinks, *I’d like to know you more. I want to know every part of you.*

“Sometimes,” Dream says, and before George can question it further, flicks his hand. “Okay. Tell me a secret.”

George thinks. He looks out towards the ocean. “I can’t swim.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” he shudders. “It’s deep and wide and vast. I feel like I’ll drown the second my toes don’t touch the ground. I can’t stand the ocean.” He looks towards Dream. “Your turn.”

“I never learned how to drive,” Dream blurts. “Even though my friend—Sapnap—he learned as soon as he turned sixteen. Your turn.”

“I’m claustrophobic. Freaks me out being in small spaces. I got locked in a closet once when I was a kid. Your go.”

Dream wants to ask if George was locked in the closet in more ways than one. No words emerge except for his next secret. “I hate my parents sometimes.”

“I keyed my father’s car once.”

“I stole oil paints from school. The whole stock.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Dream says. “For painting.”

“Well, of course,” George says. “Paint anything good?”

Dream shakes his head. “Mind painting.”

“Like you did when you met me,” George says.

Dream nods.

He says, “Your turn.”

The ocean rumbles beneath them. George inhales, exhales, and says, “I’ve never kissed anyone.”

Everything in Dream’s body stutters to a stop and then restarts again.

“No one?” he says, voice tinny to his own ears. “No one meaning no one?”

“Once in sixth grade a girl named Jenny kissed me on the cheek after school,” George recalls. “But other than that, nothing.”

Dream swallows. His voice is thick when he says, “I’ve never kissed anyone either.”

The moment stretches and stretches and stretches. The world is pulled taut before them. The sea rushes in and out; the Twins watch above, ready to set them aflame. Always waiting.

“So,” George says, “Let me tell you about other constellations.”

The moment pulls, snaps, breaks. It falls to pieces among them and the scent of jasmine. Dream doesn’t waste any time feeling bad about it. Every cell in his body is buzzing to life. The stars are vibrant and explosive overhead and Dream feels like they’re falling, crashing onto him.

(*Portrait, Self-Portrait: Throwing Armfuls of Stars into the Sky*)

George points up to the sky. His glow in the dark pen draws lines across everything. Dream wants George to draw lines all over his body, leaving him glowing too. They would twist and melt together like hot wax, becoming one. He can see it happening in his head. What would it feel like? What would he taste like?

Dream thinks about the Twins, causing things to spontaneously burst into flames.

He looks at George. The gasoline is already there, waiting for a spark. Which one of them is going to ignite it? Which one of them is going to set the two of them aflame?

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Dream goes home at five in the morning. He’s exhausted from a sleepless night, but everything in his body is alive and vibrant. His mind burns with images to draw, of he and George leaping and staying up, floating high enough to touch the stars, the ones that don’t fall to earth. They would float amongst the moon and sail away in ships made from golden sand. It would be the two of them and the scent of night-blooming jasmine and the taste of saltwater. They would carry buckets of light across the world, pouring over everyone’s heads.

He sees George through his window. He moves to draw the curtains closed, but then stops when he sees Dream.

George pushes the window open. “I like talking to you.”

*I love you, Dream shouts, I love you so much that it consumes me whole.*

Only what he really says is, “Me too.”

“Tomorrow night?” George asks, and Dream nods. He’ll see George every day. Until the sun explodes and swallows the two of them whole.

He thinks about glow in the dark ink, bursting out of the pen and splattering over both their hands. He presses his hands to his chest and glows with the idea of seeing George the next day.

(*Portrait, Self-Portrait: Two Boys Racing into Brightness*)

## End Notes

as always, if you enjoyed, please leave kudos/comments, they make me v happy <3

p.s. there is one more day of prompt week!! i'll see you all tomorrow.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!